

look homeward angel by heartofwinterfell

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Summary:

Eleven and Nancy have a tendency of taking the long way home. That's okay. There will always be someone keeping the light on and the door unlocked and their arms open to welcome them back again.

look homeward angel

Author's Note:

Hello everyone! We're all still Stranger Things trash – are we really surprised?

She wakes up in the dark and she wakes up alone.

And she's on the upside down end of the world she only just started to learn. She has to get right side up again, but there may not be a way back this time. No bath, no radio, no energy to go too far away. No friends. No him.

She screams his name until her voice feels hoarse and she runs until her legs might buckle. And she uses what remains of her energy, of her power, to break through the remnants of a gate and force her way back.

The soldiers are still lurking around corners, but she feels something warm in the pit of her stomach as she starts walking a semi-familiar path away from the building – did Mike call it school – and she doesn't know the word for the feeling either. She knows it's a kind of happiness, a faith that something she wants will happen. It grows in strength as she walks through the trees to his house.

The warmth first starts to cool when she sees all the cars outside.

She walks to the window anyway. He's there, but he's not alone. Two bad men – no, bad people – are with him. They're talking about her and the warmth in her stomach disappears completely.

Even when his glassy eyes find hers through the window, she just feels cold.

"You hurt me."

He said that to her once.

"Do you understand?"

She understood then and she understands now. A person can hurt another person just on their body. Like she once hurt Lucas. Like she kept hurting all those men in the lab and in the diner and at the school. But a person can also hurt another person in their heart. Her heart hurts so much she wonders if it will explode. It hurts with a kind of aching longing that she knows she's felt before. She felt it that night she escaped the lab.

And she knows his heart hurts too. It will hurt more if she lets him find her now. Because she also remembers holding her hand up to his head like the bad machine the bad men used to hurt her friends. It's the one they'll use to hurt his mama who buys Eggos and his pretty sister and him.

She walks away, to take all the hurt with her. But she wonders...

...

... often, late at night, why she's surprised he has trouble looking at her in the hallway.

He balls his hands into fists too, when he passes her. It hides the scar.

Hers hasn't quite healed right yet. It's because she wakes up at night almost screaming and she balls her fists too, only her nails dig into her skin and into the scar, sometimes enough to draw blood. She bandages her hand and returns to bed and starts pretending she doesn't know she'd sleep better if he were here with her.

She almost calls. Once. She often thinks about going downstairs when he picks Will up from game nights with the Mike and the boys. She never does.

He must want to get back to normal as desperately as she does and normal never included them being friends or them being whatever almost happened in the Byers's living room. Normal meant going back to Nancy Wheeler, just like all the other girls. Jonathan Byers, the pretentious creep.

The only thing that feels in between is Steve.

He sits with her at lunch and he talks about basketball but he also listens to her stories about Barb. He starts driving her home almost every day and buys her chocolate milkshakes, her favorite. She can be Nancy Wheeler, just like the other girls, but she can also remember what it felt like to kill a monster.

But she gives him a month. Just to meet her eyes in the hallway, to show his hand. He never does.

It feels wrong to say she runs back to Steve, as if he becomes a consolation prize. And when she collapses back into his arms, it feels right. So maybe Jonathan knows what's for the best. Maybe her scar will finally heal, maybe...

...

...things will be okay like this.

She hates every time she has to kill a squirrel or a rabbit and it's hard to start fires when her hands never stop shaking. But she learns snow is pretty. She sometimes catches glimpses of houses past the trees decorated in pretty bright lights like the ones Joyce had hanging all over her house. She even once sneaks a peek into a window and sees a big tree indoors covered in the color lights. There are boxes under the tree and those are colorful too. And when she closes her eyes, she dreams in vivid color.

It's better than the lab and her small room and the bath and her papa. She makes sure to think that when her heart aches a little too much. Things will be okay. She's free. She's alive. He's alive

And then she has to hit the man with the burning log. And she has to run again and she's afraid this time she'll never be able to run back. Leave Hawkins behind, leave him behind,

...

leave the past behind. That's the resolution for the new year. At least where he's concerned.

The camera is Steve's idea. She's not sure if Steve knows how little she's spoken to him over the past month, but he will want her to give it to him. Steve wants to make amends, he fought a monster because he wanted to, but Nancy understands it's hard for Steve to talk to Jonathan after everything said between them. She understands too well.

She's glad when he doesn't open it in front of her. He would have protested, pushed it back into her hands, tried to get her to return it. Then she'd have had to tell him the gift was as much from Steve as it was from her and she worries that will break something, the uneasy truce forming between them in this moment.

It's an impulse to step forward and press a lingering kiss to his cheek. It tastes like goodbye. A goodbye for now.

...

"I hoped I would find you."

"Hope?"

"It means...it's like something you wish will come true."

She has wishes now that she makes on lights that fly through the sky – shooting stars. When the snow starts melting, they sometimes go outside late at night and look up at the sky in hopes of seeing one. Never for too long, because they're not stupid, but she sees one on day fifty-six and day seventy and day ninety-nine and day one hundred and thirty-two. And some nights even when nothing flashes across the sky, she wishes on the stars anyway.

Around day one hundred and fifty she wonder if she shouldn't do that. What if wishing on regular stars make the wish not come true.

She never asks Hopper about her secret fear, but she stops wishing on regular stars. And then she stops wishing on shooting stars. She just hopes hard.

"Hurts," she says one day.

His head snaps up and he has that angry look that's not actual anger – the look he calls worry.

"Hurts," she says again and points to her chest. To her heart.

He stops looking angry and starts looking something else, something she catches glimpses of when she talks about walking a little farther away from the cabin or speaking through her radio. She asked once and he told her so softly she almost couldn't hear. Guilt.

"I know, kid."

"I hope I see him again."

"I know."

...

"I know we said we could do tomorrow, but Steve's basketball practice was moved..."

Barb's mother says she understands and Nancy wishes she stopped being so kind about it, when weekly dinners turned into twice a month dinners and twice a month dinners get cancelled or moved every other time. Nancy wants Mrs. Holland to scream at her for her selfishness, see her around town seeing movies and shopping and going to diners and demand to know why Nancy's trying so hard to live this normal teenage life when Barb can't.

But she mostly wants the Hollands to know. They're so sure that Barb is out there and Nancy doesn't know how much longer she can stomach hearing their new developments, the places they thought they caught a flash of red hair, heard the sound of her voice. Nancy sees the flashes and hears the voice, too. They call it hope. She calls it haunting.

Nancy hangs up the phone and presses her head against the side of the booth. The heat of the metal only makes her feel more lightheaded.

"Hey."

His voice is so soft, it always has been. He probably doesn't know the calming effect it has on people. She can imagine Joyce Byers telling him, him ducking his head with a blush and denying it all.

She turns, unsurprised to see him standing a good ten feet away. He's trying to smile so she tries too. "I'm okay."

"Are you sure?"

She thinks of how easy it would be to say no. But then she remembers Mike telling her about Will and his visits to Hawkins Lab. She notices the bags under his eyes. "Yes."

He nods once, gives her a tight smile, and walks towards the parking lot. She feels a little emptier and a little guiltier watching him go. She's making it a habit of watching...

...

...the clock on her wrist and the clock kitchen that she has trouble reading. She's learned that if the long line points all the way up and the little line points at the five, it means Hopper should be almost home. Five, one, five. He rarely makes it at exactly five, one, five.

But Mike always makes his calls at nine and he's never late. Always

the same time, always the same channel, always reminding her how many days.

She learns a new phrase from that – like clockwork. That’s what Hopper grumbles when she skitters off during a movie night on day two hundred and thirty five. She likes it. Mike is like clockwork. He’s never late. He’s always there. He’s her constant.

On day three hundred and sixteen, it dawns on her that she’s not his. Not really. He calls her every night, he keeps track of the days, but he never knows she’s listening. She’s his big unanswered question.

He cries on day three hundred and seventeen and she bursts open the door to Hopper’s room.

“When?” She’s still holding the radio.

“Not yet.”

The lamp on Hopper’s side table shatters and she slams the door shut behind her before he can shout anything at her. He shouts at the closed door anyway, but she pretends not to hear.

She cries on day three hundred and seventeen, too. She wraps her arms a little too tight around her bear and...

...

...squeezes hard because she doesn’t want him to let go yet. Her mom used to say she was always a little too possessive. She never wanted to let the other little girls play with her dolls on playground. That’s how she and Barb became friends. She was the first person Nancy ever handed a doll to, her favorite one.

“Geez, Nance, you’re gonna break a rib and then my coach will have to kill you.”

Nancy likes the way his chest vibrates when he laughs. She likes that

he remembers to be happy. She has hopes that happiness starts spreading like a virus if you're exposed for long enough. But it's been three hundred and twenty nine days and when she thinks she's caught the bug, it never sticks.

And she knows it's been three hundred and twenty nine days because she heard Mike yesterday when her mom demanded she go down and talk to him about plagiarizing some essay. She had heard Mike a month ago, too. And a month before that. Sometimes she turned away immediately, feeling as though she trespassed on a private world where she didn't belong. Other times she sat at the top of the stairs and listened with her head resting against the bannister. She once heard him mention her own name, telling El how Nancy could do her make up for real when she gets back.

Nancy had cried then like she is nearly crying now, but instead of letting go of her tears, she lets go of Steve. His happiness had faded while she drifted off in thought, so she fixes him a smile and he returns it so much wider than she could ever manage and she wishes once again that she could catch his disease.

"Okay, you can go now," she says with affection on her tongue and in her heart. She hopes he knows he's her hero. No matter what.

"I love you," he says as he climbs out her window.

No matter if it's still a little hard for her to say it back. Nancy can say it and know it's true, but she worries too often that she means something different when she says it, even if they both don't know what's different yet.

A difference that makes her fall asleep at night wishing he could have stayed and waking up from a nightmare with a different person's name on the tip of her tongue. Always calling out...

...

"Mike!"

She's caught in something. It wraps around her legs and tries to pin down her arms. She wrenches one arm out of it's grip and hears a crashing sound somewhere in the distance.

"Mike!"

"El!"

The voice is all wrong – too deep, too loud, not him, never him. Too strong hands grip her shoulders, shake once but not very hard. She's knows before she opens her eyes that she's back in her room at the cabin with her sheets tangled around her legs. Her eyes dart to the far corner of the room where a chair lays shattered in pieces, to add to the El nightmare junk pile. That's what Hopper calls it.

Hopper's there. He's never been late when she has a nightmare. So though Mike will always be here constant, Hopper can be her guardian. She has come to understand that word can mean so much more than false promises and demands and being forced inside a little cell.

"You'll see him soon. We'll get him here soon."

That promise is three hundred and forty five days late, but she still trusts him to make it come true. When she stops trusting him...

...

...she'll stop feeling this way. She remembers another time she chased something at the bottom of a container laced with alcohol. What was it then? Popularity? Love? Did she find it?

She didn't find Barb. No, Ms. Perfect couldn't manage that. Maybe if she asked Jonathan for his pictures earlier, demanded more of Steve, demanded more of the cops, not lied to Barb's parents, always lying to Barb's parents, maybe if she...

Filled her cup again. She can't remember how it drained so quickly.

She thinks she sees a flash of golden brown hair, plain clothes at a Halloween party. If she shouts his name, he'll come running. That was their deal, right? They save each other. An image of a faceless figure with too many teeth devouring a deer flashes across her mind. The gate is closing and she won't be able to reach it in time. She walks a little too fast and stumbles. Someone catches her arm, someone that's not Steve or Jonathan.

The two people in the whole world who she can talk to, one who wants it all to go back to normal and one who retreated from her to make it so. Or maybe she retreated from him. And maybe he only wants it to be normal again because he's just as traumatized and this is his only solution to making it better. Because what has she had to offer thus far?

The answer to her question is another drink. So she frees her arm...

...

...and returns to the second to last place she saw him. It makes her happy to see it looks exactly the same. Constant.

Walking the halls is harder. She remembers them better in the dark, with blinking lights overhead. But in the daylight, they look happier. Almost pretty. One of her shooting star wishes was getting to go to school someday, with him and with Lucas and Dustin.

Ending up back at the big room – the gym, she distantly remembers Dustin calling it – seems inevitable. She found Will here. She can find him, too.

He's standing in the center of room, so real and whole and smiling. If she rushes over and touches his face now, he will not disappear into smoke. But the girl circling around him on a strange thing with wheels will not disappear into smoke either.

And something clicks in her head that never fully connected before. Three hundred and fifty three days means more than TV and books

and fiddling with the radio and eating Eggos for people who exist outside the little world Hopper constructed for her. The boys – Mike – they went to school, they played their games together, rode their bikes all around Hawkins, and they met new people. New friends.

She is not a part of the group anymore. This new girl is.

"You're the last thing he needs right now."

There's a sour taste in her mouth and it's enough for her to pull the not-bike out from under the girl. It's satisfying for a brief moment, but then she has to watch Mike rush to make sure the new friend is okay and she has to turn away from him. She has to walk away, just like she had to walk away three hundred and fifty three days ago.

Being stupid and dangerous will hurt him. She'll have to keep being half-happy, compromising and seeing him only...

...

...when the world is about to end. She can invite him to parties, keep playing the normal teenage girl, but maybe she'll only really know him again when the world is about to end.

"Mike hasn't been okay," she says quietly as a Clash song closes on their third mixtape of the drive. She feels his eyes on her, but she keeps her focus on the cornfields going on for miles ahead. "He keeps skipping classes, not doing homework, yelling at teachers..."

"Graffiti in the bathroom," Jonathan adds. "Will told me."

"And it felt like I should be the one who kept an eye on him because I'm the one who understands. We both lost someone and I think we both wanted someone who would acknowledge it all really happened...but I guess I was so afraid that if I tried to talk to him, he would shut me out or accuse me of..."

"Treating him like he's broken," Jonathan finishes and Nancy's eyes finally drift over to him. His hands are tight around the steering wheel, knuckles white. She looks down at her own hands, clenched in

fists. They're falling back in synch.

Suddenly Nancy feels that if she stays in the car another second, she'll start to scream. And she does. "We have to go back."

"What?"

"Turn around right now. We have to go back. We have to make sure they're okay." She's talking too fast. The words start running together. "We left them, we just left them. Turn around, Jonathan!"

He pulls the car over and when he kills the engine, the music abruptly stops. The car fills with the sound of her heavy breathing. Her hands are still in fists, but he places a hand over hers anyway.

"Mike has both your parents and his friends and Will has him and my mom and Hopper and...Bob." Jonathan cracks a smile at that and it's enough to make Nancy smile, too, even as her eyes well with tears. "And I think seeing the lab...what's still in there...they're just setting the problem on fire and hoping it will eventually go away. And you're right...they have to be held responsible for all of it. That's how we can help Barb and Mike and Will."

Nancy unfurls her fist from underneath his hand, twists her pinkie around his. She uses her free hand to swipe a fallen tear off her cheek. "You really think we're doing the right thing," she asks, because she has to be sure. She has to know this is what he wants, too.

"I think we're trying to."

He pulls back on to the road, one hand on the steering wheel and one hand covering hers. It stays that way for a long time...

...

...and she is not sure how she's supposed to let go. She knows forever means all of her time – that's what Hopper said – but she could spend

her forever holding her mama's hand. Even though it's colder than she ever dreamed it would be. And mama doesn't know how to squeeze the way Hopper does, the way Mike used to. Squeezing means everything will be okay.

So she squeezes instead, a few times every hour to make sure mama still knows she's there.

Only she cannot be for much longer. Mama wants her to find her sister and Becky has told someone else she's here. The bad men may be here soon and if they find her here, they'll hurt mama again.

She takes her mama's hand one last time and holds it to her chest. "Why does it always hurt, mama?"

Her mama's eyes move from the TV, only for a moment. "Jane."

Eleven – *Jane* – nods once. Then she steps out the door.

...

An hour after she slammed the door shut, she falls on her back and wonders why she feels like she's home in a stranger's bed.

His arms wrap around her waist so easily. He's smiling and she's always loved his eyes when he smiles.

Oh. That's why.

...

"Are your parents here?"

She looks over and a woman across from her has a worry look on her face. It's different than Hopper's worry look, less anger. Maybe a little

sadness that grows when it takes too long for her to respond to the question.

“Are you meeting them in Chicago?”

“I’m seeing my sister.”

The woman smiles now and her hand goes to her stomach. It’s big in a way Hopper taught her means a baby. She wonders if the baby will be someone’s new sister.

“So going home then?”

The way the woman is still smiling makes Eleven think the right answer is yes. The cold feeling in her stomach tells her the answer may be no.

...

“I said the answer is no!”

“Liar!” She giggles into his chest. His hand tangles in her hair. “You cannot tell me Will never made you dress up to play that stupid game with them.”

“Hey! Dungeons and Dragons is not stupid.” Nancy looks up at him and quirks an eyebrow. “You asked me if I ever dressed up, you never asked me if I ever played with them.”

“I guess we’ll just have to change that when we get back. We can get you a sword and a helmet.”

“And we’ll find you a crown. You can be the princess with a shotgun.”

“I’m not sure Mike would like that last part,” Nancy says and she’s smiling harder than she has in a long time just thinking about her brother and his friends arguing about whether or not they can allow

a gun into their perfectly medieval game. Mike would be yelling loudest, yelling no. He never liked things to change too much. Or drift too far out of his control.

Their dad sometimes mutters about how he wound up with two polar opposite children. Nancy started realizing a year ago they're actually made up of a lot of the same parts, jumbled up in a slightly different order.

She misses him; she misses him so much, she has the urge to jump out of bed and grab the nearest phone, blow all their alibis just to hear the sound of his voice. She misses the year she could have spent with him, the year she spent retreating under excuses that getting back to normal meant pretending not to get along. Chasing him down the stairs and acting angry when he stole a handful of quarters. A handful of stupid quarters.

"We'll be back soon," Jonathan whispers in her ear and she knows instantly he had been thinking about his brother too. She hopes they're together, helping each other. Wheeler stubbornness means you never leave a friend behind.

The room is starting to feel a little too foreign now. Home is his arms, but it's also her house, her brother, and their cursed little town. She's not all the way there yet. She has miles to go before...

...

...she sleeps. She had been too nervous to close her eyes on the trip there, but all her energy is drained now and it's not because of her powers.

She saw too many ghosts over too short a period of time. Not ghosts in white sheets with holes for the eyes, but ghosts of real people, supposed to be dead people, who will not let her rest. And the ghost of a real person, a still alive person, filled with anger she has never seen before.

Eleven thinks she might be filled with that much anger too. She needs to find another place to put it and as the bus inches closer to Hawkins, she thinks she knows where to lay it all to rest.

But first...

...

...she pulls Mike into her arms the moment the car skids to a stop outside of the Byers' house.

He's too tall for her to lift him up in her arms like she used to do when they were kids, so she settles for holding him hard and letting him cry into her neck. Over his shoulder, she watches Jonathan carry Will into the house, his mother's hand never leaving her young son's limp body even as her whole being looks on the verge of collapse.

"He saved us," Mike repeats over and over into her shoulder. Nancy reaches up to stroke his hair, saying nothing. Eventually the crying turns to light sniffles, both from him and her. She wants to take his pain away, but she doesn't know how yet.

She gently nudges him back towards the house, the outside feeling too exposed. She wonders if they'll ever really feel safe in Hawkins again. When everyone who tries to save them ends up...

...

Here.

Eleven does not tell Hopper that she feels scared, but she thinks he knows as he leads them down into the basement, bad machine always pointing forward. She thinks he's scared too and that it's the same thing they're both afraid of – that this place will finally swallow them

whole like it's tried to do so many times before.

It swallowed up mama and it swallowed up her sister and it wants to swallow up even more of her home. And what if she has to be the price paid for keep that home safe.

But she promised him she would come back. And he promised they'd go to the snowball. They're both three hundred and fifty three days late, but as long as they're both still here at the end of the night, nothing will have been broken.

She's still scared. And she's still angry. But she's hopeful.

The elevator descends. It ends here.

...

They all make it back somehow.

Steve and the kids had stumbled in first, taking all four of them to deposit their bloodied babysitter back on the couch. Nancy learns this later in a thrilling saga told by the overlapping voices of Lucas, Dustin, and Max. Hopper pretends to look angry that they disobeyed his orders to stay in the house, but Nancy catches him ruffling Dustin's hair and slapping Lucas on the back before he retreats into Will's bedroom to sit with Joyce.

The three storytellers fall asleep against the couch by Steve, Max's head resting on Lucas's shoulder. They still look ready to pounce on anyone who steps a little too close and Nancy reminds herself to ask Steve about that later.

For now she drifts toward the doorway of Will's room, shrugs off her coat on the way and lets it drop to the floor. Her shirt is still sticking to her skin, but she has no energy to care. Her body collapses against the doorframe, half-lidded eyes taking in the scene before her.

Joyce is tucked on the left side of Will, hand stroking his cheek. Her

other hand is wrapped in Jonathan's, who is sitting on the other side of Will smiling down at his brother like he cannot believe he's real again. Hopper stands behind Joyce, hand twitching at his side. Maybe he craves a cigarette, but Nancy believes he really longs to reach out and place that hand on Joyce's shoulder.

The chief glances up at her, startling her out of her observational daze. He nods once at her. Nancy wishes he hadn't. She wanted the picture to last a little longer, wished she had Jonathan's camera to capture the moment.

Jonathan who is now looking at her. He can't seem to believe she's real either.

Joyce pats his hand, drawing his attention. "Go sleep." He opens his mouth as if to protest, but both Joyce and Hopper look stern and resolved.

Jonathan leans over and presses a soft kiss on Will's forehead and Nancy wishes even more for that camera. Her memories will have to be enough. He gets up slowly and moves to the door, to her, and presses his forehead against the side of her head, hand ghosting over her lower back.

"You did good, kids." Nancy locks eyes with the chief again and she wonders if he knows the full story or if they'll all be telling more tales tomorrow.

Jonathan's hand moves to her wrist, gently tugging her out of the doorway. Tomorrow then. There's going to be a tomorrow. The thought makes her feel almost giddy, but her body is too tired to manage anything but a small smile as she allows Jonathan to lead her towards his bedroom.

The door is already half open with the light on. Two figures already take up the bed.

Mike has his back resting against the headboard. His eyes are still open, but he is not looking at the doorway. His focus is only on El, curled up asleep beside him, hands tangled in his. He's whispering something Nancy cannot make it out. She wouldn't want to try.

But she does step into the room and her footsteps bring up Mike's gaze. Nancy puts a finger to her lips and moves to his side of the bed. There's still enough room for Nancy to climb up beside him, taking his free hand in her own and resting his head on her shoulder. Jonathan comes around and sits at the end of the bed, hand coming to rest on her calf, thumb moving in soothing circles.

"She finally came home."

The top of her head feels wet. He's crying again. That's okay because she is too. And when she looks over at Jonathan, she sees the tears welling up in his eyes, though maybe they never left. But Nancy can get used to happy tears. She'll cry them everyday for the rest of her life if it meant her heart got to feel half as full as it does now.

...

"She finally came home."

El hears the sentence replay over and over in her dreams. Each time, her heart feels ready to burst. In a good way. There's just too much love in it.

She opens her eyes slowly and there is sun pouring in from the windows. It creates a pretty glow around Mike's head. Their noses are almost touching. She can start counting the freckles on his nose if she wanted to. She can reach out and touch him. So she does. She reaches her hand out, the one not still clutched in his grip, and pokes his cheek. He moves a little, scrunches up his nose, but his eyes do not open.

That doesn't matter. He's here.

El moves her head slightly, exploring the unfamiliar room for the first time until her eyes find a sight that is familiar, that makes her heart happy hurt all over again.

Hopper is fast asleep in a chair tucked in the corner of the room, still

bundled up in the big puffy coat. He's making those sleepy nose sounds – snoring – and El smiles so wide it makes her face hurt. Happy hurt.

Her feet stretch out a little and she hits something with her toes. She looks to the bottom of the bed and sees Will's brother curled up there, his head by someone else's feet. El glances back to Mike, to figure curled up behind him.

Mike's sister – Nancy.

Her eyes flutter open. El gasps and looks away, suddenly and strangely nervous to face her.

"Hey." Her voice is gentle. El steals another glance and she sees Nancy smiling over Mike's head.

"Hi."

They're both silent for a moment, trading smiles that are a little unsure but reassuring all the same.

"How-..." Nancy pauses, momentarily frowns. She struggles to find the words. Then her smile returns and a spark of light flashes across her eyes that El can now not look away from. "How about some Eggos for breakfast?"

Nancy reaches her hand across Mike. El sees a light scar that runs across her palm and she reaches out, lightly running her fingertip over the white line. There's something pretty about it, something – "Strong."

They intertwine their fingers. "You too."

In between them, Mike huffs. "Shut up, Nancy. I'm trying to sleep."

At that, the girls dissolve into giggles and Nancy separates their hands to start poking her fingers into Mike's side. He shudders and tries to bat her hand away. El keeps laughing and dares to start lightly poking at his side too. "Hey! Come on! Cut it-..."

His eyes fly open and his hand freezes. The hand still holding hers

suddenly squeezes tightly, as if she'll vanish into thin air if he does not anchor himself to it. Behind him, Nancy sits up and begins rubbing his shoulder. Jonathan has gotten up and slips his hand into Nancy's free one. Scar touching scar. Though she cannot see him, El is sure Hopper's awake now, watching them quietly. She hopes he's smiling.

But she keeps her eyes on Mike. El does not have a name for the look she sees in his eyes, but she imagines she once looked the same when she was watching the stars.

"You're...you're..."

She wants to tell him she knows exactly how feels, how many times she woke up and realized that reunions she had with him were all dreamt up. She wants to tell him that her heart is about to burst with happy hurt too, of realizing that it's finally more than a dream. She wants to tell him he can poke her cheek a few times to prove it.

She doesn't say any of that, though. She doesn't need to.

"You're..."

"Home."

Author's Note:

A few things –

1) I didn't get to google anything fun for this fic. Disappointed to say the least.

2) The title is a reference to the book by Thomas Wolfe of the same name. armed with stories you will leave was also originally inspired by Thomas Wolfe's You Can't Go Home Again, so thanks Tom for all the help! Sorry I never actually read your 700 page book in high school!

3) Really just out here doing my best to include Wheeler sibling feelings since we got none of that this season.

4) I hope you all enjoyed this! I know it's pretty angsty for 4k+ words, but I'm just happy this season ended on such a high note (minus that last 30 seconds) so this fic ends on a happy note too!